

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 17/2 (Autumn 2006): 135–158.
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Slavery, Prophecy, and the American Nation as Seen by the Adventist Pioneers, 1854-1865

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Early Sabbatarian Adventist leaders¹ railed against slavery as a great evil in the United States and eloquently proclaimed the equality of all human beings. They wrote numerous articles in the *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*² denouncing slavery. Their writings, however, revealed that the Adventists' understanding of America's role in prophecy shaped how and why they viewed slavery in the manner they did. The purpose of this paper is to attempt to provide an understanding of this unique Adventist position regarding slavery and its connection to America in prophecy.

This study covers the period from 1854 to 1865, the time when the nation was preoccupied with the divisive issues of slavery and the Civil War. During this time, Adventists were seeking to recover from the failed expectation that Jesus would return in 1844. Calling it the bitter disappointment,³ Adventists experienced tremendous despondency, and

¹ While these individuals would eventually form the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in the period between the failure of William Miller's millennial predictions in 1844 and formal organization in 1863, they were simply Sabbatarian Adventists, believing that the Advent of Christ was near and that the date, October 22, 1844, held prophetic significance. *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 44 (Spring 2005): 155.

² This periodical, originally called *The Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*, is now called *Adventist Review*. This has been the major periodical of the Seventh-day Adventist Church over the years and continues to function in that capacity.

³ The failure of Christ to return as predicted on October 22, 1844, became known as the great disappointment to people within the Advent movement. See Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, eds., *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987). For a view of the lasting effects of Millerism and the great disappointment on the shaping of the Seventh-day Adventist

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many people left the movement. A small group among them began to seek for the reasons why God had disappointed them. During their disappointment and their attempts to organize, the United States of America was embroiled in a bitter debate over slavery, a conflict so fierce that it would lead to a bloody civil war.

Many of the early Adventist leaders were northern abolitionists, and their writings reveal that they followed the evangelical abolitionist tradition. Erin Reid argues that evangelical reformers aroused by the Second Great Awakening fitted their theology to embrace perfectionism and adopted a postmillennial eschatology that necessitated public and political action against the sin of slavery. Adventists, on the other hand, had different theological motivations that affected their moral instruction and ethical action. Even after their tremendous disappointment, they continued to believe and preach the soon coming of Jesus and the end of the world. Even in this post-1844 era, Adventists remained firmly entrenched in the pre-millennial camp. For them, the world was not improving but was becoming progressively worse. The “signs of the times” everywhere proclaimed the end of the world. Slavery was identified as a central sign of the corrupt human structure. The writers of the *Advent Review* argued that the proper ethical response of Adventists was not only to publicly denounce the sin of slavery, but to “disassociate themselves from fallen civil and ecclesiastical power structures,”⁴ but it was their understanding of America’s place in prophecy that fired their passion for opposing slavery. Their opposition to slavery reflected their interpretation of America in prophecy as a lamb-like beast acting like a dragon (Revelation 13). They eloquently denounced the gross hypocrisy of the nation and pointed out that the evil of slavery revealed America’s dragon-like behavior, in spite of its lamb-like behavior—which was shown by its proclamation of freedom, justice, liberty, and a constitution that asserted the self-evident truth that all men are created equal.

The success of the revivals in the wake of the Second Great Awakening had led many clergymen to predict that America would be the site of the kingdom of God on earth, prophesied in Revelation in connection with the Christ’s second coming.⁵ Adventists, unlike other Protestants of

Church, see Francis D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1944).

⁴ <http://www.oakwood.edu/history/Ejah/Ereid.htm>.5.

⁵ John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches 1830-1865*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984), 20.

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that era, rejected the notion that America was a God-ordained enterprise or that it could ever become one; they argued that while the nation was to be admired for its lofty constitution and republican principles, the practice of slavery was a manifestation of its ungodly nature or its dragon-like qualities.

The Anti-Slavery Movement

The mid-eighteenth century found the American nation embroiled in a fierce debate over the issue of slavery. The abolitionist movement led the charge against the institution of slavery. Through constant agitations, meetings, writings, petitions, drives, and lectures, abolitionists waged a relentless war against slavery. But slavery was only overthrown after a bloody civil war that resulted in the death of over 600,000 Americans. The steep price paid to crush slavery speaks of how deep-rooted and malignant was the cancer of slavery that had fastened itself onto American society. Nothing less than the shedding of blood could atone for America's original sin—slavery. The abolitionists who called for the immediate, uncompensated cessation of slavery were truly revolutionary. Slavery was the cornerstone of Southern society and the platform of its entire social structure. Slave owners dominated the branches of power—legislative, executive, and judicial—and they established and maintained the social order. They converted even poor whites who owned no slaves to the ideology of white supremacy that undergirded the system of slavery. Thus, campaigning for the overthrow of slavery was a call for the overthrow of the social order. Such a revolutionary idea met with fierce resistance from those in power. This resistance was felt not only in the South, but especially among those in the North who had a profitable interest in the continuation of slavery. “Merchants, manufacturers, and capitalists were against the abolitionist movement, for trade with the South was important. . . . In 1833, when the American Anti-slavery Society was founded by law-abiding people for the good morals, the nature of their meeting was regarded by Southerners and by the vast majority in the North as, ‘an assembly of anarchists.’”⁶

Some Americans understood the revolutionary nature of the abolitionists' call for the end of slavery. Immediate abolition in practical terms meant the transfer of millions of dollars in capital and investment from the ruling elite. The abolitionist movement, although possessing

⁶ Herbert Aptheker, *Abolitionism: A Revolutionary Movement* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), xii.

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this revolutionary element, formed part of a larger series of reforms that were sweeping the nation. These reform movements grew out of a great revival sweeping America at this time, called the Second Great Awakening.

Impact of the Second Great Awakening

The Second Great Awakening was probably the most influential revival of Christianity in American history.⁷ It started in the last decade of the eighteenth century and ended in the 1830s. Some scholars have identified three major phases of the Second Great Awakening. These were separate in space, time, and character.⁸

The first phase of this awakening was in New England with its epicenter in the congregational churches and Yale University in Connecticut. These reformers emphasized the moral character of God's government and a move away from original sin to an emphasis on the active role and responsibility of the individual.

The second phase of the Second Great Awakening occurred among Scotch-Irish pioneers of the Southwest, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Southern Ohio. Men like James McGrady, Barton Stone, and Robert Tinely, joined by Methodist and Baptist preachers, spearheaded the movement. Revivals were passionate, exciting, and highly emotional. The itinerant preacher and the camp meeting format grew out of this revival, becoming a part of frontier life.⁹

The third phase of this awakening fell somewhere between the first two phases. The greatest intensity of this revival occurred in upstate New York, which became known as the "Burned-Over-District."¹⁰ It was here that the Shakers erected their distinctive communities, where John Humphrey Noyes sought to create a utopia, and where Joseph Smith allegedly met the angel Moroni who showed him the buried tablets of the book of

⁷ See William C. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978.) See also Paul K. Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1990).

⁸Peter W. Williams, *America's Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-first Century* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2002), 184.

⁹ Ibid., 185, 186.

¹⁰ See Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York* (New York: Harper, 1965). See also C. A. Johnson, *The Frontier Campmeeting* (Dallas: Southern Methodist UP, 1955); and D. D. Bruce, *And They Also Sang Hallelujah: Plain-folk Camp Meeting Religion* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1974).

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Mormon that would give birth to Mormonism.¹¹ However, the leader most identified with the upstate New York revival was Charles Finney, lawyer-turned preacher, whose preaching epitomized the shift in emphasis from the First Great Awakening, where revival was the work of God, to the new view that religion was the work of humans. Finney argued that a revival of religion was not a miracle, but the result of the right use of human action. The Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards in the First Great Awakening now gave way to the human ability to do what God wanted. This did not mean that human beings acted autonomously, but rather asserted a God-given ability to make right choices.¹²

Finney not only exalted human will in conversion, but also the ability to triumph over sin. During the 1830s, he began to link his moral reform campaigns against alcohol and slavery. Finney argued that when people were truly converted, they would not engage in either of these vices.¹³

How did the Second Great Awakening affect slavery? While the First Great Awakening focused on the conversion of individuals, the Second Great Awakening had broader aims. The goal was to bring about a "Christian America"; in order to do this; the revival had to be hitched to a new idea: Reform.

"Reform" became the watchword of early and mid nineteenth-century America. Reform movements sprang up everywhere. There were those who advocated the rights of women, the promotion of peace, humane treatment of the imprisoned, and the abolition of slavery. Many revivalists took on the mantle of reform, with the result that revival and reform became twin sisters.¹⁴ No other reform crusade disrupted the churches more and shook the nation to its foundation than the antislavery movement. Various societies were formed for the abolition of slavery. What they advocated ranged from gradual abolition to immediate abolition. Some organizations, such as the Colonization Societies, campaigned for the removal of Blacks from America to Africa. However wide their differences were, they succeeded in making slavery a national issue. Through the instrumentality of revivalism and reform, the people of the North began to be swayed by a moral revulsion against slavery.

¹¹ Williams, 187.

¹² Ibid., 188. See also Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (New York: Revell, 1835), 12.

¹³ See Adrian Hastings, ed., *A World History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 431.

¹⁴ Williams, 191.

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Although many Northerners agreed with the South that Blacks were inferior and in need of paternal protection, they disagreed with those who argued that the protection was being provided through the system of slavery.¹⁵

Many northern Christian abolitionists agreed that slavery was sinful, but they did not all agree that slavery should be abolished immediately or gradually. At a convention of Christian abolitionists in New York in 1845, they resolved the following: "Those who admit the sinfulness of slavery . . . and yet vote for oppression, or for those who are connected with proslavery parties, are guilty of the most inconsistency; and are undeserving of the name Christian patriots, and unworthy to be recognized as true friends of the downtrodden Christianity."¹⁶ These statements were intended to encourage Christian abolitionists to vote for antislavery political parties as a way of advancing the abolitionist cause.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's epic novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in 1852, which became one of the most widely read books of the period, indicted the system of slavery and America's role in it. The novel ended in an apocalyptic tone predicting cryptically the coming Civil War.

This is an age of the world when nations are trembling and convulsed. A mighty influence is abroad, surging and heaving the world, as with an earthquake. And is America safe? Every nation that carries in its bosom great and unredressed injustice has in it the elements of this last convulsion. . . .

Christians! Every time that you pray that the kingdom of Christ may come, can you forget that prophecy associates in dread fellowship, the *day of vengeance* with the year of his redeemed? A day of grace is yet held out to us. Both North and South have been guilty before God; and the *Christian Church* has a heavy account to answer. Not by combining together, to protect injustice and cruelty, and making a common capital of sin, is this Union to be saved,—but by repentance, justice and mercy; for, not surer is the eternal law by which the millstone sinks in the ocean, than that stronger law by which injustice

¹⁵ Ibid., 196.

¹⁶ John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionists and the Northern Churches* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984), 147. See also Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse, 1830-1844* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1933); Dwight Lowell Dumond, *Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1961); and Bertram Wyatt Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland: P of Case Western Reserve U, 1969).

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and cruelty shall bring on nations the wrath of Almighty
God!¹⁷

The slavery issue would split denominations and churches, especially the three great national evangelical denominations—Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian. This division of denominations would foreshadow the split within the nation.¹⁸ Of the reform movements that emerged from the Great Awakening, the anti-slavery movement had a profound impact on the issue of slavery. Adventists were deeply influenced by these developments, but the ethics and reasons that motivated their opposition to slavery were quite different from those that motivated the other evangelical abolitionists. Many Adventist leaders came out of the Millerite movement, so we must consider some of the prevailing views among certain key Millerite leaders in order to understand the background to their views on slavery.

Abolitionist-Millerite Connections

Ronald Graybill asserts that many of the early Millerite leaders¹⁹ showed abolitionist tendencies of varying degrees. Although there is no record of Miller's active participation in the anti-slavery society, he was known to have revealed his attitudes toward abolition movements in a practical way. On one occasion, a fugitive slave was sent to Miller's farm with the hope that he would feed him and direct him to Canada. It seems clear that Miller actively helped this runaway slave.²⁰

Joshua Himes, Miller's closest associate, was well known to William Lloyd Garrison, the most recognized abolitionist leader of that time, who described Himes as an "avowed abolitionist and faithful supporter of the anti-slavery movement." He was also a supporter of many of the other reforms sweeping New England at that time and was a counselor and contributor of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society until the end of 1842.²¹

¹⁷ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Literary Classics of the United States (New York: Viking, 1982), 476-77.

¹⁸ John Corrigan and Winthrop Hudson, *Religion in America* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1992) 216-218.

¹⁹ After the Great Disappointment some of the Millerite leaders would form the nucleus of the early Sabbatarian Adventists.

²⁰ Ronald Graybill, "The Abolitionist-Millerite Connection," in Numbers and Butler, 140.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 140.

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However, as the expected date of Jesus' return drew near, Himes became more absorbed in preaching the Gospel, and his abolitionist activities diminished. According to Arthur Spalding, "Himes allowed his active interest in abolitionism to subside as he became more swallowed up in the all-absorbing task of promoting a movement which expected, shortly, to meet the Lord face to face."²² Himes may have reasoned that soon the Lord would come and the slaves would be free, so that continual agitation for their freedom was no longer necessary. But after the Disappointment, Himes continued with his anti-slavery activities. The abolitionist leader Frederick Douglas noted that while attending the Convention of the Evangelical Alliance in London in 1846, Himes spoke vigorously against seating slaveholders. Douglas identified Himes as the American Adventist clergyman who was virtually the only American delegate who took this anti-slavery position.²³

Charles Fitch, another important Millerite leader, was also well known in the abolitionist circle for his tract, "Slaveholding Weighed in the Balance of Truth and Its Comparative Guilt Illustrated." In that tract, he argued that slavery was as bad as or worse than liquor traffic, theft, robbery, murder, and treason. He warned of God's judgment on the oppressors. Although Fitch became one of Garrison's opponents due to his condemnation of Garrison's criticism of clergymen and the Sabbath, nevertheless Garrison still recognized Fitch as a well-known abolitionist.²⁴

Chief among the less prominent Millerite leaders who embraced the abolitionist reform movement was George Storrs. Along with Orange Scott and Leroy Suderland, Storrs led out in the anti-slavery cause in the Methodist church. Storrs was condemned by conservative bishops at the 1836 General Conference session in Cincinnati for speaking at a local anti-slavery society. He eventually left the Methodist ministry and later converted to the Millerite movement, becoming a powerful Millerite evangelist after 1842 and preaching extensively throughout Ohio and Indiana.²⁵

²² Francis D. Nichols, *The Midnight Cry* (Takoma Park: Review and Herald, 1944), 176.

²³ John W. Blassingame, ed., *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series 1: Speeches Debates and Interviews*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979), 1:421-422.

²⁴ Leroy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. (Washington: Review and Herald, 1946-1954), 4:533-534.

²⁵ Ronald Graybill 142.

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These Millerite leaders who embraced abolitionist ideas stopped short of the latter Sabbatarian Adventist views of connecting slavery with America in prophecy. This connection of slavery with America's role in prophecy appears to be something that was their own unique interpretation.

Sabbatarian Adventist Views on Slavery

Early Sabbatarian Adventists held strong anti-slavery sentiments that extended beyond the views of their Millerite forbears and were different in motivation and ethics from the Protestant abolitionists' views, which focused on slavery as a societal sin that needed to be repented of and abandoned so that the perfectibility of human society could be realized. An example of this view of slavery can be seen in the admonition of the Reverend Amos Phelps, who advised his congregation that they must "assail slavery in its true character as moral evil for the existence of which moral agents are responsible and guilty." He further described it as sin—and a crime. These radical abolitionists did not see slavery simply as an abstract evil; it was sinful both in principle and practice. It was also a national sin in which everyone was equally implicated and equally guilty.²⁶ The Adventist pioneers agreed with many of these ideas about slavery, but they saw this as further evidence to support their interpretation of America as the fulfillment of Revelation 13. Adventists, who were still ardent believers in the soon return of Jesus in spite of their devastating disappointment of 1844, saw slavery as a central sign of the evil human structure and the end of the world. They viewed themselves as a people of prophecy, and this sense of prophetic destiny would shape their understanding of slavery within the American context. America was this two-horned beast, and slavery was an example of the dragon-like quality of this two horned beast.

Between 1854 and 1865, a series of articles in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* identified the United States as the two-horned beast of Revelation 13. The following excerpt is typical of the many that described the character of the beast in these terms:

And he had two horns like a *lamb* and he spoke as a *dragon*, Rev 13:11. This animal has a dragon heart. His disposition, his motives, his intentions and desires are all like a dragon, his outward appearances, his horns . . . are lamb-like.

²⁶ Loveland, Anne C. "Evangelicalism and Immediate Emancipation in American Antislavery Thought," *Journal of Southern History*, 32 (1966): 176-177, 181, 182.

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In appearance he is like a harmless lamb but when he raises his voice in acts of authority his dragon-like character is revealed. This is a two-faced hypocritical beast that first appears with mildness and equity but has the fierce prompting of a dragon heart. The institution of slavery most clearly reveals the dragon spirit of this hypocritical nation.²⁷

This view was articulated by John Andrews, considered one of the most brilliant young minds of the movement, and who would go on to become the church's first official missionary and its third General Conference president. There was substantial agreement with Andrews's exposition by the other Adventist pioneers, and this was reflected in the writings of the leading figures of early Adventism. It was clear to them that slavery was a wicked and evil thing, but for them, slavery represented the dragon-like quality of the two-horned beast representing America. Their interpretation of slavery focused on pointing out how America fulfilled prophecy, and slavery was one more sign of the end of the world.

The identification of America as the two-horned beast of Revelation 13 did not originate with, nor was it unique to, these Sabbatarian Adventists. According to Leroy Froom, earlier American writers saw in this two-horned beast a power representing a union of church and state involving Protestantism in America. The 18th Century Baptist historian Isaac Backus' "Protestant Beast" allusion in 1788 pointed primarily to Britain, but in part to America. There was also Judge John Beacon's identification of some Protestant clergy along with the papal beast. Elias Smith's definition of this power was applied not only to the pope, but also to the American established churches. Samuel M. M'Corkle applied this symbol to Protestantism.²⁸ These writers all predated the Millerites, and although they were not as explicit in their application of the two-horned beast to America, it can be seen that this was not a new idea. What was new was its connection to slavery as evidence of America's being this two-horned beast.

Uriah Smith and Slavery

Uriah Smith, the longest serving editor of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* and one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist

²⁷ J. N. Andrews, "The Two-Horned Beast. — Rev. xiii. Are the United States a Subject of Prophecy?" *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 19 March 1857, 156.

²⁸ Froom, 1099.

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Church, was one of the major proponents who linked the practice of slavery in America to its dragon-like quality and condemned the evil of slavery in strong language. He described it as a black and revolting iniquity which any nation pretending to be civilized would repudiate. He condemned those who used the Bible to defend slavery and chided those who by their silence condoned slavery. Smith quoted from an article in the *American Missionary* to prove that Adventists were not alone in discerning the hypocritical and wicked character of the United States. He also pointed out that the issue at hand was not just slavery but also racism, the evil of mistreating both free and enslaved Blacks because of their color:

The free and enslaved people of color have suffered, and are suffering grievous wrongs at the hands of the white inhabitants at the hands of the Church and those who minister at God's altar. Although the revolutionary patriots and statesmen asserted that all men were equal before the law, and founded the government upon that noble principle, although some of them protested against the dogma that man can hold property in man; although the Declaration of Independence asserts, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"—and although the Constitution declares that it was, among other things, ordained to "establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves (the people of the United States, white and colored) and our posterity," yet, from the foundation of the government to the present time the free people of color have been maltreated and scorned, in the North as well as in the South, and their enslaved brethren inhumanly peeled and goaded in the South, aided in the inhumanity by the North.²⁹

The writer also asserted that the South was not the only guilty party, but that the North was just as culpable:

The North has joined hands with the South in oppressing the colored man throughout the whole country. Exulting in their own freedom the whole inhabitants of this country have trampled upon the rights of the poor and needy, and practically

²⁹ Uriah Smith, "National Sin," *American Missionary*, 20 August 1861, 941. Quoted in *Review and Herald*, Vol. XVIII.

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given the lie to the principle of equality engraven upon the cornerstone of our political edifice. The world has been witness of this, and the enemies of a Republican government have taunted us with our hypocrisy or indifference “to the opinion of mankind.” Professing to be a Christian nation, the people—we allude to the masses—have set at naught the precepts of Christianity, in their treatment of their colored brethren, forgotten the exhortations of God, and unheeded his warnings, until the patience of the Father of all appears to have been exhausted, and he has come out against us in judgment. His voice to the American people is this: “These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thought test that I was altogether such a one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.”³⁰

Smith exposed the blatant hypocrisy of the American nation using its own freedom to enslave others and daily trampling upon the fundamental principle of equality that was the foundation of its political structure. His words also struck a prophetic note, for like the other Adventist pioneers, he predicted coming judgment upon the American nation. God would not be silent forever. But even as Smith predicted judgment upon the American nation, he seem to offer the nation a way out. This judgment was not inevitable. Smith’s words convey an opportunity for repentance as he said, “consider this ye that forget God.”

Smith’s blistering words against slavery and its connection to America in prophecy are best revealed by excerpts from this poem that appeared in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*:

*With two horns like a lamb a beast arose—
So with two leading forms a power has risen,
Two fundamental principles, than which
in all the earth none can be found more mild,
More lamb-like in their outward form and name.
A land of freedom, pillared on the broad
And open basis of equality;
A land reposing ‘neath the gentle sway
of civil and religious liberty.
Lamb-like in form, is there no dragon-voice
Heard in our land? No notes that harshly grate
Upon the ear of mercy, love and truth?
And put humanity to open shame?
Let the united cry of millions tell—*

³⁰Ibid.

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*Millions that groan beneath oppression's rod,
Beneath the sin-forged chains of slavery,
Robbed of their rights, to brutes degraded down,
And soul and body bound to other's will
Let their united cries, and tears, and groans,
That daily rise, and call aloud on Heaven
For vengeance, answer; let the slave reply.
O land of boasted freedom! Thou hast given
The lie to all thy loud professions, first,
of justice, liberty and equal rights;
And thou hast set a foul and heinous blot
upon the sacred page of liberty;
And whilst thou trafficest in souls of men,
Thou hurl'st defiance, proud, in face of Heaven
Soon to be answered with avenging doom.³¹*

Uriah Smith's dissection of America as the lamb-like beast is revealed in a series of articles he wrote comparing and contrasting the American lamb-like profession with its dragon-like works.

Lamb-like Profession

Early acts of the government
Declaration of Independence
Constitution

Dragon-like Behavior

Slavery
Religious Intolerance
Corruption and Oppression

Smith, true to his premillennialist views, expressed pessimism about the future and predicted that the dragon-like voice of America would be developed further and would speak louder as the end of time drew near.³² Smith identified slavery as an example of the dragon voice of America and asserted that even after the abolition of slavery, the spirit of slavery would live on through political necessity. Little did he know how accurate his prediction was, for although legal slavery died on the battlefield of the Civil War, its spirit lived in the oppressive sharecropping system that Blacks were subjected to. He also argued that if the people of the South, along with their allies in the North, had the power, they would reinstate slavery. He described it as a disease gone underground but not cured and predicted that it might be the source of serious trouble later on.³³

³¹ Uriah Smith, "The Warning Voice of Time and Prophecy," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 23 June 1853, 8.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

James White and Slavery

James White, another of the founding fathers of the Seventh-day Adventist church, also railed against slavery, but his connection of slavery to America's fulfillment in prophecy was not as explicit as in Smith, Andrews, or Loughborough. He used very strong language to denounce slavery, and like his fellow expositors, he sought to expose the blatant hypocrisy of the nation. White described slavery as the thing America held most sacred. In other words, slavery was America's greatest object of worship. It was America's god. White compared many of the things America considered sacred and concluded that slavery trumped them all. This assertion by White seems rather extreme, but I think he wanted to make the point of showing the supreme regard with which slavery was held in American society.

Many things are esteemed sacred in America; the most sacred thing is slavery. The Constitution is held sacred, but not so sacred as slavery. When the two come in contact it is the Constitution that has to give way. When the Constitution is found to be against slavery it is the Constitution that is to be "amended." . . .

Liberty is held sacred; but not so sacred as slavery. Where slavery appears, liberty hides her head and vanishes, of course . . .

The Bible is held sacred; but not so sacred as slavery. Its Decalogue, its golden rule, its law, its gospel, are all revised and set aside by the code of slavery. It annuls marriage, withholds the Bible, enforces labor without wages, and sells the temple of the Holy Ghost as a chattel, and remains a Bible institution still! . . .

Nationality is held sacred; but not so sacred as slavery. When slavery calls for secession, nationality is cast off as an abhorred thing.³⁴

James White pointed to slavery as the cause of the Civil War and argued that the federal government's aims could not be achieved unless it

³⁴ James White, "The Sacredness of Slavery," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 11 June 1861, 17. Note that this was written about two months after the attack at Fort Sumpter, after the South had seceded, and during the naval blockade, but before Lincoln issued a call for troops and before the Civil War fighting began in earnest, a time of intense agitation both for war and for peace. White may have been referring to the Democrats in the North who wanted to protect Northern workers' jobs and wages by keeping Blacks in the South.

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removed the diabolic iniquity of slavery. He interpreted the Civil War as chastisement from God upon the North for their complicity in the great evil of slavery. He urged the North to repent and cleanse its hands of the stains of slavery and take a bold and uncompromising position and seize every opportunity to abolish and crush slavery. Only when this was done would divine help be granted. In November of 1861, White criticized the practice of Union troops returning runaway slaves to their former masters. He warned of disaster, defeat, and disgrace upon them if they continued this practice.³⁵

In his famous editorial, "The Nation," in August of 1862, White revealed America's place in prophecy and identified slavery as the "darkest and most damning sin upon the nation." He predicted that the nation would drink of God's wrath as punishment for the sin of slavery. He even encouraged Adventists to vote for Lincoln, interpreting that vote as a decision against slavery and against the secession of the South. However, he cautioned against military involvement in the war to free the slaves. Adventists were noncombatants, and although they were willing to wage war against slavery with their pens, they were unwilling to kill for the sake of abolishing slavery. Like Uriah Smith, he predicted that slavery would survive to the end of time,³⁶ but he did not explain in what form it would occur.

Loughborough and Slavery

John Loughborough, another early Adventist leader, also identified America as the lamb-like beast of Revelation 13 and like his mentor John Andrews made a strong and explicit connection of slavery to America's fulfillment in prophecy. He described the lamb-like appearance as its republican and Protestant roles. The two horns were identified as Protestant ecclesiastical power and republican civil power. The Declaration of Independence was cited as an example of its lamb-like profession: "We hold these two truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Loughborough argued that if the people lived out this declaration, then they would all love their neighbor as themselves and all persons would be on an equal footing.

³⁵ James White, "The War and Its Cause," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 12 November 1861, 188.

³⁶ James White, "The Nation," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 12 August 1862, 84.

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But in accordance with what John the Revelator sees, the lamb-like beast speaks as a dragon. He cited the bondage of three and one-half million American Black slaves as proof of this dragon-like voice. He derided the Declaration of Independence by suggesting it should have a clause that states "all men are created free and equal except 3,500,000."³⁷

Loughborough condemned America as the boasted land of freedom whose soil is cursed with the damning sin of slavery. He attacked the hated Fugitive Slave Law that demanded the return of runaway slaves to bondage and punished those who aided the slaves in their flight to freedom. He excoriated the self-righteous Protestants of the North for their coddling of the evil of slavery. He cited two examples: A Virginia woman was convicted of the crime of teaching a Negro child to read, and a slave burning in Mississippi because a slave raised his hand against a White man was witnessed by 4,000 other slaves from nearby plantations. Loughborough described numerous speeches by magistrates and ministers of religion warning slaves of the same fate if they should prove rebellious to their master. Loughborough mockingly declared: "Here is a specimen of the scenes that are transpiring in the boasted land of liberty—'all men created free and equal.'"³⁸

Loughborough further lambasted those clergymen who tried to justify slavery from the Old Testament, arguing that the American form of slavery cannot be compared with patriarchal slavery. He pointed out that certain principles governing that form of slavery (e.g., the freeing of slaves at jubilee) were not followed by American slaveholders. He challenged the masters to carry out this practice and to observe its outcome.³⁹

One reader responding to Loughborough supported him by describing America in these words:

America is the most degraded at present, morally and religiously of all free and Protestant countries. "It is the reproach of evangelical Christendom . . . Her slave holders defy God and man, and the freemen of the free states sacrifice their political freedom and the personal rights of the Negro to a low and noisy political party. The United States are to us a greater grief than heathendom and popery for the names of Christianity and Protestantism, of civil and religious liberty are blasphemed through them. Oh, that the free states may burst their

³⁷ J. N. Loughborough, "The Two Horned Beast of Revelation XIII, Symbol of the United States," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 21 March 1854, 66.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 65-67.

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fetters, get rid of the accursed thing and join the mother country in leading the march of Christianity and civilization.”⁴⁰

Loughborough described the character of the lamb-like beast in these terms:

Its Character. This is all revealed to us in one sentence, short indeed, but abundant in meaning: [Rev. xiii, 11:] “And he had two horns like a *lamb*, and he spake as a *dragon*.” Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh; therefore the animal has a dragon’s heart. His disposition, his motives, intentions, desires, are all like a dragon; his outward appearance, his horns, which must of course be prominent objects to the beholder, his open profession, are all lamb-like. His appearance is good enough, and we might be led to look upon him as a whole, as quite an amiable creature, were it not that when he raises his voice in acts of authority, he speaks as a dragon: like the old fable of the ass in the lion’s skin; if he only had not brayed, his fellow-beasts would have taken him for a lion.⁴¹

Loughborough argued that the demands of slavery are imperious and unquenchable.

The demands of Slavery are imperious, and must be complied with. It began, in 1793, by asking more territory. The territory is purchased and surrendered to its service. Again, it asks for more slave States to equalize its power in the Senate; and to soothe it into quiet, Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana and Mississippi are successively opened to its foul embrace. It wants more privileges still. The slaves, though mere chattels, must have some influence in the ballot box. A compromise is effected by rendering five slaves equal to three white men in political influence; in other words, a slave on election day becomes *three-fifths* of a man! On all other days he is a *thing*! . . . But the grasping ambition of slavery is unquenchable. Texas is wanted to consummate its purposes. The imbecile North bows assent, as ever, to the dictates of the usurper; and Texas is gained to slavery, to say nothing of Utah and New Mexico.⁴²

⁴⁰ Sel, “What is Said of Us,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 8 April 1858, 167.

⁴¹ Loughborough, 167-168.

⁴² *Ibid.*

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The Fugitive Slave Bill was described as “that monster of human iniquity.”⁴³ Loughborough did not mince words in his denunciation of America as a slave-holding nation. Like Uriah Smith and John Andrews before him, Loughborough was unequivocal in identifying America as the two-horned beast of Revelation 13. Slavery was not the only sign, but was among a constellation of signs that pointed to America as this two faced beast.

Joseph Bates and Slavery

Joseph Bates, another founder of Adventism, not only spoke against slavery, but was an ardent abolitionist. He wrote in his autobiography of his support of the oppressed. He confessed that he could not be a consistent Christian if he stood with the oppressor. He wrote of praying for and remembering “them that are in bonds, as bound with them.” He prayed also that God would save his country from the curse of slavery.⁴⁴

Bates wrote of the tremendous opposition he received due to his anti-slavery principles. He described resolutions denouncing him and his fellow anti-slave comrades in severe terms.⁴⁵ Bates mocked the colonization societies for their opposition to abolition and accused them of being the worst enemies of the free people of color. He also pointed out that they labored to perpetuate slavery in the slave-holding states.⁴⁶

Bates’ abolitionist activities predated his conversion to the Millerite movement. In 1839, he first made contact with Millerism and was converted to the movement in 1840. Francis Nichol noted that as Bates became more active in promoting the teaching of the Second Advent, he gave less time to reform organizations like the antislavery society, where he held membership.⁴⁷

Bates explained his reason for focusing more on preaching in this way:

My reply was, that in embracing the doctrine of the second coming of the Savior, I found enough to engage my whole time in getting ready for such an event, and aiding others to do the same, and that all who embraced this doctrine would and must necessarily be advocates of temperance and abolition of

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Joseph Bates, *Autobiography of Joseph Bates*, 1868 (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1970), 236.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 237.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 233.

⁴⁷ Francis Nichol, *The Midnight Cry* (Takoma Park: Review and Herald, 1944), 182.

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slavery; and those who oppose the doctrine of the second advent could not be very effective laborers in moral reform.⁴⁸

Bates was not turning his back on the abolitionist movement, for he went on to say that he was now “working at the fountainhead” of reform. He still believed in temperance and abolition, but he was attacking the problem at its very source. Like Himes, Bates must have reasoned that preparing men and women for the second coming of Jesus was a more exalted work, and ultimately all true reform would find its fulfillment at the coming of Jesus. Unlike the other Adventist expositors, Bates made no connection of slavery to America’s fulfillment in prophecy.

J. N. Andrews and Slavery

J. N. Andrews, another noted Adventist leader of the period, also attacked slavery and like his fellow Adventist contemporaries identified America as the lamblike beast of Revelation 13 and connected slavery to America’s fulfillment in prophecy. He mocked the American Constitution’s lofty claims of equality by asserting that

the same government that utters this sentiment in the face of this declaration will hold in abject servitude over 3, 200, 000 humans, rob them of their rights with which they acknowledge that all men are endowed by their creator. . . . In the institution of slavery is more especially manifested thus far, the dragon spirit that dwells in the heart of this hypocritical nation.⁴⁹

Years before the outbreak of the Civil War, Andrews warned of impending catastrophe by quoting a certain Erdix Tenny:

We may sleep over the encroachments of Slavery, but we sleep upon the mouth of a volcano. When its general dominion, which seems approaching in mad haste, is perfected, an Egyptian darkness covers us—an Egyptian retribution has overtaken us. The experience of other nations, the divine rebukes of similar sins far less aggravated, warn us of a hastening catastrophe, more signal and terrific than was visited upon those nations, as our guilt is deeper. Our only hope of preserving our children, our civil and religious institutions, and our country from the debasing, destructive influences, the tyranny of Slavery, is in God; and without speedy, manly, determined

⁴⁸ Bates, 182.

⁴⁹ J. N. Andrews, “The Three Angels of Rev. XIV, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 19 March 1857, 156.

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resistance of its encroachments, even this hope is presumption.⁵⁰

Ellen White and Slavery

Ellen White, considered the most influential voice and one of the founders of Adventism, had very strong views against slavery. Like the other Adventist expositors of her time, she also identified America as the fulfillment of the two-horned beast of Revelation 13. In her own words she wrote: "Here is a striking figure of the rise and growth of our nation. And the lamblike horns, emblem of innocence and gentleness, well represent the character of our government as expressed in its two fundamental principle, republicanism and Protestantism."⁵¹ In 1889, a quarter century after the Civil War, she identified the beast as Protestantism and the speaking as a dragon as a satanic force propelling the Sunday movement.⁵² She did not make a direct connection of slavery to the fulfillment of America in prophecy as the two-horned beast in Revelation 13; however, she pointed out that the defense of slavery by some of the churches was proof that they were a part of Apostate Babylon. "God will restrain his anger but a little longer. His anger burns against this nation and especially against the religious bodies who have sanctioned and themselves engaged in this terrible merchandise." She warned that God's anger would not cease until America drank from the cup of God's fury. She equated America with Babylon, who would be given her reward for all the sins that she committed. Mrs. White described in graphic language how heaven beholds with indignation the terrible degradation of slavery and how the Savior is moved with compassion for the slaves. She described slavery as a grievous and enormous sin, using much stronger language than the most radical abolitionists. It can be argued that although she did not make an explicit connection of slavery to America's fulfillment in prophecy, she agreed with their sentiments concerning America's dragon-like behavior, as she used similarly harsh terms to describe America's culpability in slavery.

Her counsels on slavery focused more on the immorality of slavery and the responsibility of the church towards the slaves. She repudiated the idea of slaves being the property of their masters, an idea that formed

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ White, *Spirit of Prophecy* (Battle Creek: Steam Press, 1870), 4:277.

⁵² Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 1 January 1889, 275.

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the legal basis of American slavery: "Their Maker alone is their master. . . . Those who degraded slaves will experience God's wrath."⁵³

She affirmed the equality of all people regardless of status:

The religion of the Bible recognizes no caste or color. It ignores rank, wealth, worldly honor. God estimates men as men. With him, character decides their worth. And we are to recognize the Spirit of Christ in whomsoever it is revealed. No one need be ashamed to speak with an honest black man in any place or to shake him by the hand. He who is living in the atmosphere in which Christ lives will be taught of God and will learn to put His estimate on men.⁵⁴

She proclaimed that God died for all people, but has special pity for the downtrodden:

The Lord has looked with sadness upon the most pitiful of all sights, the colored race in slavery. He desires us, in our work for them, to remember their providential deliverance from slavery, their common relationship to us by creation and by redemption, and their right to the blessings of freedom.⁵⁵

Mrs. White encouraged the church to work especially for the oppressed. "God loves them all, and makes no difference between white and black, except that He has a special, tender pity for those who are called to bear a greater burden than others."⁵⁶

For her, pro-slavery sentiments came from the devil: "Some have been so indiscreet as to talk out their pro-slavery principles—principles which are not heaven-born, but proceed from the dominion of Satan."⁵⁷ She called slavery an accursed sin in the sight of heaven:

Satan was the first great leader in rebellion. God is punishing the North, that they have so long suffered the accursed sin of

⁵³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 1:388.

⁵⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 9:223.

⁵⁵ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1958), 2:486.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 487.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

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slavery to exist; for in the sight of heaven it is a sin of the darkest dye.⁵⁸

She asserted that those who are converted would view slavery as something evil.

You have never looked upon slavery in the right light, and your views of this matter have thrown you on the side of the Rebellion, which was stirred up by Satan and his host. Your views of slavery cannot harmonize with the sacred, important truths for this time. You must yield your views or the truth. Both cannot be cherished in the same heart, for they are at war with each other.⁵⁹

She called slavery a blot upon the nation's history:

God saw the foul blot of slavery upon this land, he marked the sufferings that were endured by the colored people. He moved upon the hearts of men to work in behalf of those who were so cruelly oppressed.⁶⁰

She viewed the Civil War as God's punishment for the high crime of slavery.⁶¹ She argued for reparations to the slaves: "The American nation owes a debt of love to the colored race, and God has ordained that they should make restitution for the wrong they have done them in the past."⁶²

Those Americans who made no effort to fight against slavery were not spared her indictment. Even though many Whites took no active part in slavery, they were still held responsible for helping to improve the conditions of Blacks:

Those who have taken no active part in enforcing slavery upon the colored people are not relieved from the responsibility of making special efforts to remove, as far as possible, the sure result of their enslavement.⁶³

⁵⁸ Ibid., 359.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ellen G. White, "An Example in History," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 17 December 1895, 801-802.

⁶¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 264.

⁶² Ellen G. White, "Am I My Brother's Keeper," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 21 January 1896, 33.

⁶³ Ibid.

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Ellen White counseled the church to remove from their membership those who held and promoted pro-slavery views:

Your views of slavery cannot harmonize with the sacred, important truths for this time. You must yield your views or the truth. Both cannot be cherished in the same heart, for they are at war with each other. . . . But notwithstanding all the light given, you have given publicity to your sentiments. Unless you undo what you have done, it will be the duty of God's people to publicly withdraw their sympathy and fellowship from you, in order to save the impression which must go out in regard to us as a people. We must let it be known that we have no such ones in our fellowship, that we will not walk with them in church capacity.⁶⁴

It seems clear that Ellen White detested slavery and counseled the church repeatedly about reaching out and ministering to the slaves to ameliorate their condition. She indicted the nation for permitting this terrible evil to exist and held it accountable for reparations. She repudiated decisively the prevailing theories on race and affirmed the common humanity of all people.

Summary and Conclusion

Most of the leading voices among the Adventist pioneers identified America as the two-horned beast of Revelation 13 that spoke as a dragon and pointed to slavery as one of the strongest evidences of America's dragon-like quality. This was a view that was held by Uriah Smith, James White, J. N. Andrews, and John Loughborough; all prominent leaders in early Adventism. While their views on the immorality and evil of slavery were similar to those held by anti-slavery evangelical leaders of their time, they differed significantly in how slavery was related to the American nation. This can be explained by how they viewed the state of society and the world. It was not uncommon at that time for many prominent religious leaders to view America as a kind of utopia that needed cleansing, especially from the evil of slavery, so it could become a prototype of the future kingdom of God. In other words, they saw America as God's special experiment, different from all other earthly kingdoms that preceded it. The Adventist pioneers, being students of the prophecy of Daniel that described the rise and fall of great powers, saw America as another one of the great earthly powers that would rise and

⁶⁴ White, *Testimonies*, 1:359.

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fall as did Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. They had no illusions about the ultimate destiny of America, for this nation was governed by sinful men, as other nations were, and was therefore doomed to ultimate failure.

By pointing out slavery as a fulfillment of America in prophecy, they were simply repudiating any notion of America being some type of the kingdom of God. These men were not unpatriotic or disloyal to America because of this damning critique of America. On the contrary, their frank words regarding America's "original sin" revealed their courage and bravery.

What was the central point of these Adventist pioneers? The end of the age was at hand; things would not get better, not even in America. America was not the answer to the problems of humanity. They wanted to put to rest the popularly held belief of America's divine origin and destiny. Even though they believed America was guided by providence, America was a man-made experiment and therefore a sinful enterprise. The distinct feature of the nation was its deceitful and hypocritical nature. It gave the impression of a gentle, harmless lamb, but beneath that lamb-like pretension was a fierce dragon heart. It was a dragon beast at its core; it did not evolve into one. This pessimistic view of the future did not cause the pioneers to remain silent on the great social ills of the day. They spoke out against them and encouraged the nation to change.

The pioneers also believed that this dragon-like quality would become more evident as we approach the end of time. In other words, its lamb-like quality would recede as its dragon-like quality predominated. Is it possible that the pioneers may have been predicting a time in America's future when the nation will repudiate its lamb-like qualities of democracy, freedom, and justice and evolve into a totalitarian police state? In the present climate of fear and uncertainty, it is not inconceivable that in the name of security and safety many of the freedoms that we now enjoy will be suspended. The government may be forced to choose between freedom and security and will almost certainly choose security with the view of preserving the nation. That time may be upon us sooner than we imagine and will make the words of these Adventist pioneers startlingly relevant.

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